

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-07 LAB-04
NSAE-00 SIL-01 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-12 PM-05 H-01
L-03 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06
/085 W

-----117705 241356Z /46

R 241216Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4442
INFO AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM
SECDEF WASHDC
USMISSION USNATO

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, MILI, BE
SUBJECT: UNIONS IN THE BELGIAN MILITARY - THE SOLDIER
AS CIVIL SERVANT
REF: 76 BRUSSELS 7428

1. SUMMARY. IN AN INITIAL TEST OF STRENGTH, THE BELGIAN
MILITARY UNIONS, DEMONSTRATING AT LIEGE JANUARY 21,
BROUGHT SIGNIFICANT PRESSURE ON THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE
TO STOP PLAYING POLITICAL FAVORITES AND TO OPEN BONA
FIDE NEGOTIATIONS LOOKING TO THE CORRECTION OF WHAT
ARE GENERALLY REGARDED AS SERIOUS INEQUITIES IN THE PAY
OF THE MILITARY VIS-A-VIS THE CIVIL SERVICE GENERALLY.
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THE PRICE OF AN EVENTUAL SETTLEMENT COULD, OF COURSE,
REPRESENT A SIZEABLE INCREASE IN THE "WAGES AND
SALARIES" LINE OF THE DEFENSE BUDGET. END SUMMARY.

2. TWO OF BELGIUM'S FOUR PRINCIPAL MILITARY UNIONS
(REFTEL), ANTICIPATING THE FULL RECOGNITION AND
BARGAINING RIGHTS PROVIDED IN A MINISTRY OF DEFENSE BILL

SUBMITTED TO PARLIAMENT LAST NOVEMBER, LAUNCHED THEIR FIRST TRADE UNION OFFENSIVE AT LIEGE JANUARY 21. THE OCCASION WAS A MASS DEMONSTRATION BY SOME 6000-8000 MILITARY PERSONNEL (INCLUDING ALL RANKS EXCEPT GENERALS) IN SUPPORT OF A DEMAND FOR PAY PARITY WITH BELGIAN CIVIL SERVANTS OF LIKE GRADE AND RESPONSIBILITY. THE PRINCIPAL ORGANIZERS OF THE DEMONSTRATION WERE THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION OF MILITARY UNIONS (INDEPENDENT) AND SYNDIC, THE MILITARY UNION AFFILIATED TO THE LIBERAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION (CGSLB). THE RELATIVELY WEAK SOCIALIST (CGSP) AND CHRISTIAN (CCSP) MILITARY UNIONS DID NOT PARTICIPATE.

3. THE DEMONSTRATION WAS ORDERLY, BUT SPIRITED. M. DOLFEYN, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE GENERAL CONFEDERATION REPROACHED THE CGSP AND THE CCSP FOR NOT JOINING IN THE ACTION. HE ALSO INVITED THE MINISTER'S ATTENTION TO THE STRENGTH AND REPRESENTATIVE CHARACTER OF THE GROUPS INVOLVED AND URGED THAT "VAGUE, UNKEPT PROMISES" GIVE WAY TO GENUINE NEGOTIATIONS ON THE DEMANDS. SYNDIC PRESIDENT LEROY WAS EQUALLY OUTSPOKEN, ACCUSING THE MINISTRY OF TAKING ADMINISTRATIVE ACTION TO PREVENT A LARGER NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS FROM BELGIAN UNITS IN GERMANY FROM REACHING LIEGE FOR THE DEMONSTRATION. LEROY WENT ON TO ACCUSE THE MINISTRY OF YIELDING TO PRESSURE FROM THE SOCIALIST AND SOCIAL LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CHRISTIAN PARTIES TO ENTER INTO PRIVILEGED NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE MINORITY CGSP AND CCSP. WARNING THAT "A DISCONTENTED ARMY IS A DANGEROUS ARMY", LEROY CALLED ON THE DEMONSTRATORS TO CONTINUE THEIR ACTION UNTIL SATISFACTION IS OBTAINED. IF NECESSARY, A SECOND DEMONSTRATION WILL BE HELD IN BRUSSELS AT A DATE TO BE ANNOUNCED. AMONG THE PLACARDS CARRIED BY THE DEMONSTRATORS WERE SOME WHICH READ: "BELGIUM, NATO'S CANCER"; "TWO BELGIAN SOLDIERS FOR THE PRICE OF ONE DUTCH SOLDIER"; AND "WAGES FIRST, ROCKETS SECOND".

4. LEROY AND DOLFEYN TOOK LITTLE ACCOUNT OF A JANUARY 20 COMMUNIQUE ISSUED BY MINISTER OF DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS DENYING ALLEGATIONS THAT HE HAD FAILED TO DEFEND THE INTERESTS OF MILITARY PERSONNEL. THE COMMUNIQUE STATED THAT THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN FULLY INFORMED OF THE PROBLEM - AND THAT THE UNIONS HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT A SOLUTION IS BEING SOUGHT.

5. COMMENT. BY ALL ACCOUNTS THE DEMONSTRATION WAS A SOLID SUCCESS FROM THE UNIONS' POINT OF VIEW. MANY OPPOSED TO THE DEMONSTRATION APPROVED THE JUSTICE OF

THE UNIONS' DEMANDS. THE UNIONS' CLAIM THAT MILITARY
PAY IS BF 4500 (\$130) PER YEAR SHORT AT THE LEVEL OF
THE PRIVATE SOLDIER, AND BF 360,000 (\$10,000) AT THE
RANK OF COLONEL. IT IS WORTH NOTING THAT THE MINISTER'S
COMMUNIQUE DOES NOT DISPUTE THE MERIT OF THE DEMANDS.
6. WITH THE LIBERALS NOW OUT OF GOVERNMENT, THE
ALLEGATION OF MOD RESPONSIVENESS TO SOCIALIST AND SOCIAL
CHRISTIAN PARTY PRESSURES TO FAVOR THE MINORITY CGSP
(SOCIALIST) AND CCSP (SOCIAL CHRISTIAN) IS PROBABLY
TRUE. BUT, SUBJECT NOW TO A DIFFERENT FORM OF PRESSURE,
THE MOD MAY BE FORCED TO SETTLE DOWN TO A BONA FIDE
BARGAINING RELATIONSHIP WITH THE TRADE UNION MAJORITY.

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WHAT PRICE TAG AN EVENTUAL AGREEMENT MAY CARRY IS
PROBLEMATIC - BUT IT COULD REPRESENT A SIGNIFICANT
PART OF BELGIUM'S PROMISED 3 HIKE IN DEFENSE SPENDING.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 jan 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLITICAL MILITARY RELATIONS, LABOR UNIONS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 jan 1978
Decaption Date: 01 jan 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 20 Mar 2014
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1978BRUSSE01402
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D780035-0587
Format: TEL
From: BRUSSELS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1978/newtext/t19780131/aaaaazpw.tel
Line Count: 167
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 60ef24e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 BRUSSELS 7428
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 17 may 2005
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3727377
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: UNIONS IN THE BELGIAN MILITARY - THE SOLDIER AS CIVIL SERVANT
TAGS: ELAB, PINT, MILI, BE
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/60ef24e1-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Sheryl P. Walter
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
20 Mar 2014
Markings: Sheryl P. Walter Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 20 Mar 2014